

September 9, 2022

St. Matthew's Stewardship Poetry Exercise
Present to Congregation: September 11, 2022
Topic for Adult Education Forum: September 25, 2022

This poetry exercise is based on a fun activity that my family did via Zoom in December 2020, during some of the darkest days of the pandemic. We were a ragtag and generally unpoetic bunch, spanning three time zones, a group not necessarily inclined to the lofty. Nonetheless, it turned out great and we even compiled the poems into a nice family book. It was a wonderful uplifting surprise!

The poetry exercise follows a form created by George Ella Lyon, a poet, writer, musician, storyteller, and teacher (<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>) who created the "Where I'm From" project. This was inspired by a book by Jo Carson, titled *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet*, and has been used across the world in a variety of formats and successfully made poets of young children. So, you can do it! I've modified the directions and list below to focus on our feelings toward our church home, St. Matthew's, rather than the original prompt of "I am from".

Please come to the adult forum on **September 25** and bring your poem to share if you wish! If you have questions, feel free to reach out.

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Directions

1. Make a List

Use the following categories to list specific details related to your relationship with St. Matthew's. The key is making this as specific and personal as possible. Feel free to use nicknames or words that only you or your St. Matthew's friends/family use. **Don't** worry about readers not knowing what you're talking about. The specific images make it fun! **Don't** worry about answering all the questions. It is not a test!

- a) Significant people (godparents, godchildren, leaders, loved church friends)
- b) Special foods or meals (church brunches, suppers, Lenten soup nights, agape meals)
- c) Favorite church games or social activities
- d) Church services/liturgies that are especially? meaningful to you
- e) Nostalgic songs or hymns that have special meaning to you (hymns, praise music)
- f) Special bible stories, parables and/or meaningful St. Matthew's stories
- g) Phrases that were repeated often in church (bible verses, reading responses)
- h) The best things that you were told at church (favorite sermon, scripture passage, or just offhand remark in conversation)

- i) Special niches or objects around the cathedral that have meaning and/or make the place home
- j) Church traditions
- k) What characterizes the St. Matthew's family (quirks, strengths, traits)
- l) How do you think the church seen in the outside community?
- m) Specific story(ies) about a parish member that helped you
- n) Joys
- o) What do you take from St. Matthew's out into the world today and tomorrow
- p) What are your hopes for the future of St. Matthew's?

2. Select Items

Select from your lists the items you want to include in your poem. You do not have to include everything you listed, and you can always add more categories or items to include in your poem. There is no set length, you may find yourself on a roll and that's OK, but if you want some guidelines, let's say try to have at least 10-ish images in four or so stanzas.

Now, read Lyons' poem which follows. It is a different prompt, but you'll get the point. Specific images give it meaning. You'll discover there are items, people and situations mentioned in this poem with which you are unfamiliar. That's perfectly okay, because this poem is personal and particular to the poet, not the audience.

3. Composing

- a) Begin with "I belong at St. Matthew's where ____."
- b) Continue the next line with "where ____ and ____." (Fill in each blank with items from your list.)
- c) Continue with "where ____ and ____." (Fill in the blanks as you did before.) Continue this format until you have completed your poem (again 4-5 stanzas is a general guideline).
- d) End the poem with what you take out into the world from St. Matthew's or what your hope for the future of St. Matthew's.
- e) Reread your poem and make any changes or edits. This poem can be rewritten over and over again, and you'll probably find yourself thinking about more things that you can add to your poem even when you are finished. (Your edits may lead to significant changes, even changing the general format and throwing out the rubric altogether. That's OK, it is the personal creative process!).

Congratulations, you did it! We look forward to hearing your poem if you'd like to share!

Two examples follow which might help you get started- The first is using the original "Where I'm From" prompt by GeorgeElla Lyon. The second is from one of your fellow St. Matthew's poets...

Where I'm From
by George Ella Lyons

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the black porch.
(Black, glistening
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush,
the Dutch elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from perk up and pipe down.
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments—
snapped before I budded—
leaf-fall from the family tree.

I belong at St. Matthew's
where the stained glass windows
and the dark wood pews
drew me in
after a long time away.

I belong at St. Matthew's
where I sing
"Be Thou My Vision,"
and marvel at that song,
a thread stitched in my heart
from childhood to
now.

I belong at St. Matthew's
where Maundy Thursday,
the darkened cathedral,
the altar stripped bare,
the heavy silence, the lit candles,
are my tradition,
a faith in things hoped for,
things unseen.

I belong at St. Matthew's
where liturgy and life weave together,
where the seats fill with young and old,
where we are ourselves part of that which is larger,
larger than we can imagine,
though we try.

The cathedral drew me in,
the reverence, the silence,
the liturgy unfamiliar and yet
known.
The pews change,
the people change,
the clergy change.
But I belong at St. Matthew's,
where we love,
those inside and those outside,
where we worship,
on Sundays and each day,
where we treasure,
the past, the present, and the future.